

# TOWARDS REUSABLE MEAL PACKAGING AT OPEN EVENTS

A visitor-centered approach to raise awareness and encourage compliance in reusable meal packaging systems at small-scale open events

## CHALLENGE

Plastic is more present in daily life than ever before, affecting the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. Plastics are essential but harm the environment and climate. Single-use plastics (SUPs) are particularly problematic, as most are either incinerated, releasing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions or discarded as litter. Events contribute significantly to plastic waste, especially through single-use meal packaging. Despite the convenience and low cost of SUPs, their continued use is unsustainable. With increasing awareness and stricter regulations, transitioning to circular and sustainable alternatives is more important than ever.

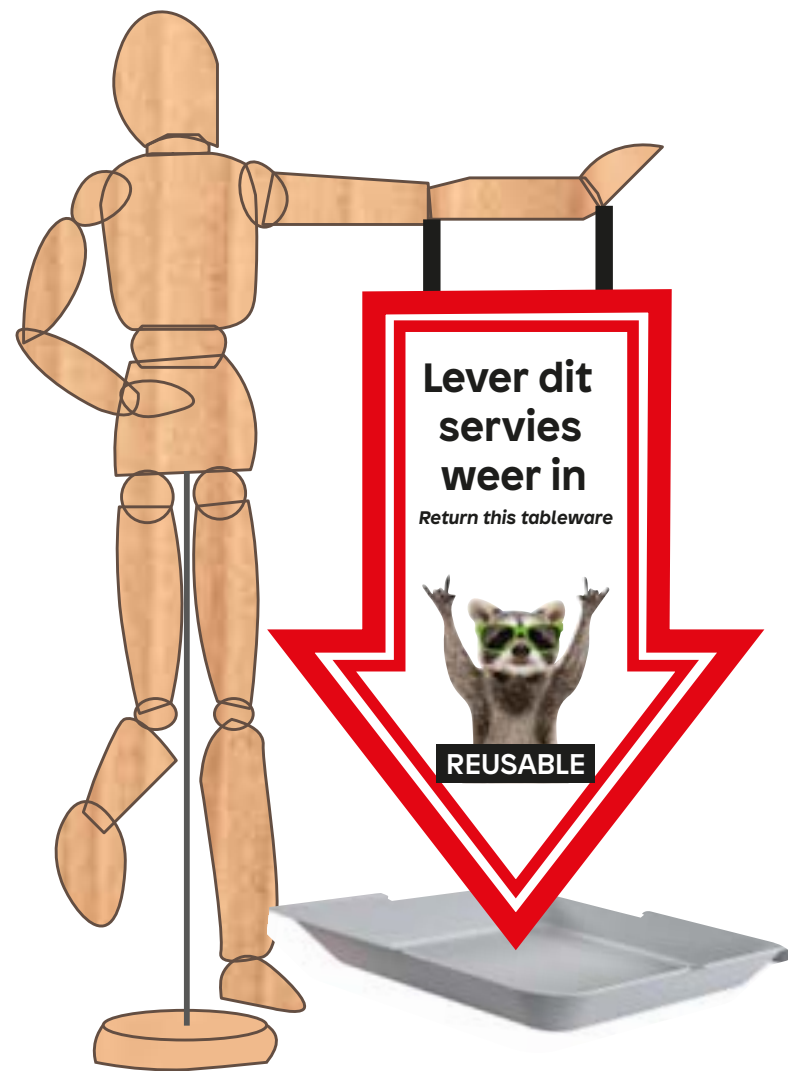
However, even as event organisers shift to reusable meal packaging, single-use habits remain deeply ingrained. Visitors, accustomed to single-use packaging, often discard reusable meal packaging instead of returning them. This disrupts the circular system by causing material loss and increasing the need for replacements. Since reusable plastic items typically contain more plastic than single-use items, treating it as single-use results in even greater plastic waste. The lack of clear strategies to encourage responsible behaviour among visitors to return reusable meal packaging leaves organisers uncertain about the economic and ecological viability of circular systems. As a result, many organisers remain hesitant to make the transition.

Design **behavioural interventions** to **positively encourage visitors to responsible use and return reusable meal packaging** during **small-scale open events**



### INTERVENTION 1 The Menu Board

The 'Menu Board' takes the form of a typical standing menu board at a food stall, but instead of the menu, it displays a message indicating that the meal packaging is reusable and should be returned. Since visitors naturally look at menu boards, this intervention makes optimal use of their line of sight.



### INTERVENTION 2 The Sign Buddy

The 'Sign Buddy' represents the caterer. It can be strategically placed on the counter, preferably next to the menu board of the caterer or payment terminal, places where visitors naturally focus their attention while ordering at the counter. This increases the visibility and effectiveness of the intervention.



### INTERVENTION 3 Fresh on your plate

The 'Fresh on your plate' is a table centerpiece, an object placed on the table, typically to make the table visually appealing or to create a specific atmosphere. This centerpiece takes the form of a flower arrangement, but instead of flowers, it contains fresh herbs. Visitors can pick herbs to enrich their dish. The 'Fresh on your plate' serves as a striking decorative element that also plays a functional role: it reminds visitors that the meal packaging is reusable and should be returned, as the message is displayed on the intervention.



# REUSABLE

### INTERVENTION 4 Reusable and return symbol

There is no universal symbol for reusable meal packaging although having one would help users recognize that the meal packaging is reusable. That is why this symbol is designed. Placing this symbol on each reusable meal packaging ensures consistency making it easier for visitors to identify the reusable meal packaging regardless of the event or location.



### INTERVENTION 5 The Green Gallery

The Green Gallery is a glass display case. To nudge people before they discard the reusable meal packaging in a waste bin, the display case is placed next to waste stations with the packaging inside. When visitors see this, they notice the same type of packaging in their hands and hopefully realize that the packaging they hold has value, as people tend to associate items in a display case with value.

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### Additional framework

The wishes and expectations of visitors at events with a reusable meal packaging system have been analysed and presented in a framework. This framework acts as a checklist with guidelines to follow when implementing such a system. It supports the system and focuses on optimising the visitor experience, making it easier and clearer for event organisers to ensure that visitors' use of the reusable meal packaging system is straightforward.